



**Evidence for  
Excellence in  
Education**

## **Report**

# **School choice: The parent view**

**National Foundation for Educational  
Research (NFER)**



# School choice: The parent view Survey of parents 2014

Karen Wespieser  
Ben Durbin  
David Sims

Published in April 2015  
By the National Foundation for Educational Research,  
The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ  
[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)

© 2015 National Foundation for Educational Research  
Registered Charity No. 313392

ISBN 978-1-910008-65-2

**How to cite this publication:**

Wespieser, K., Durbin, B. and Sims, D. (2015). *School Choice: The Parent View*. Slough: NFER.

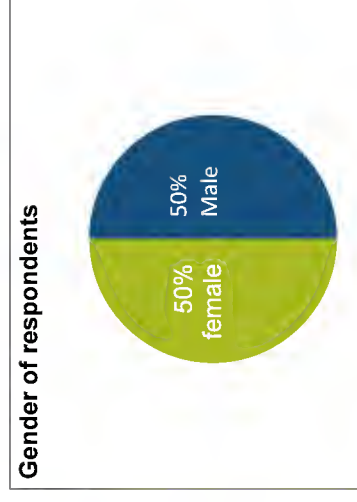
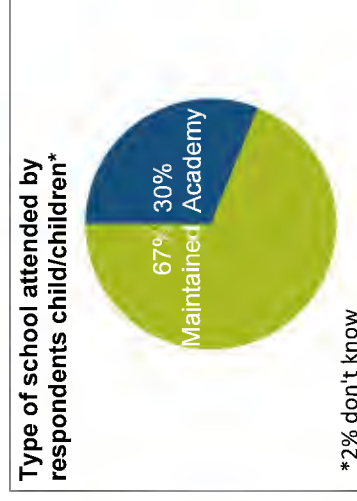
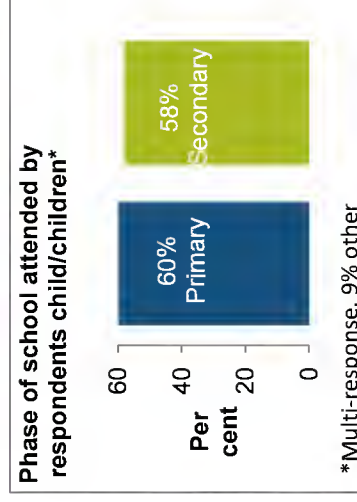
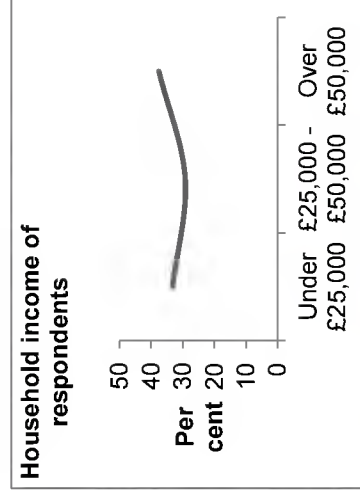
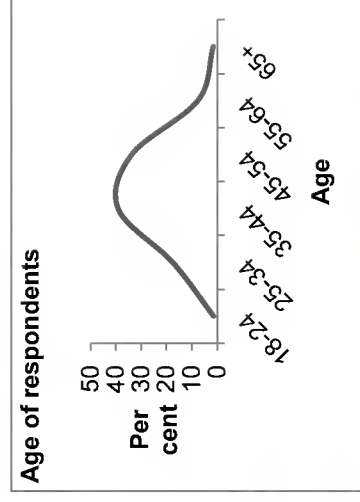
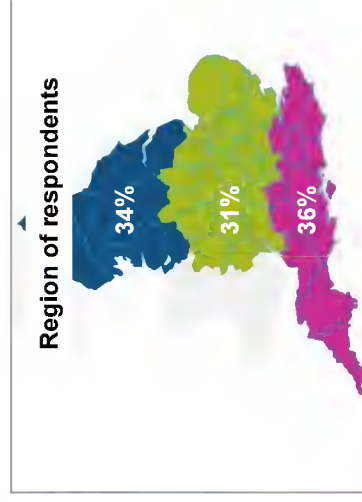
Contents

1	Methodology	1
2	School choice	2
3	Local accountability	6
4	Academy schools	8
	References	11



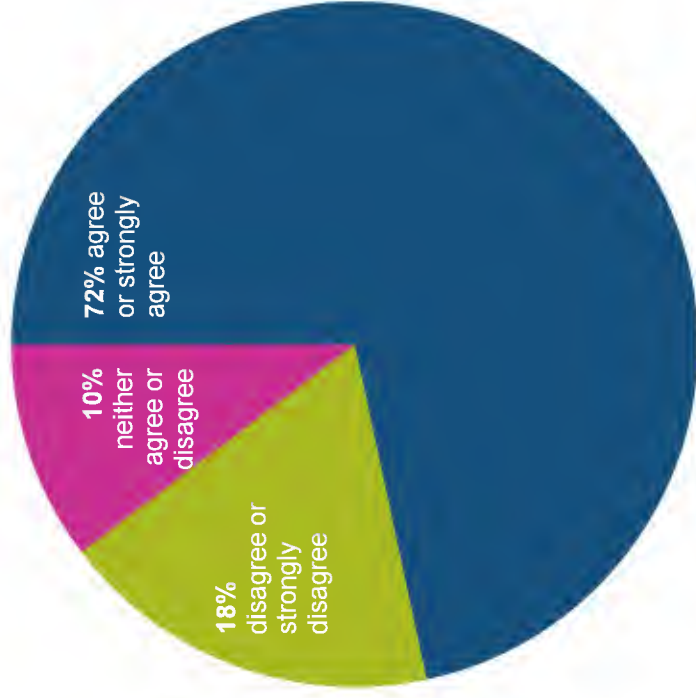
# 1 Methodology

- Data collected by Research Now in December 2014 and January 2015 on behalf of NFER.
- Survey conducted with 1005 parents of children aged 5-18 participating in an online panel.
- Sample selected to include 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female respondents from across England.
- Other variables sampled included: age, child age and household income.
- Subgroup comparisons (e.g. by household income) only presented where differences are statistically significant ( $p=0.05$ )



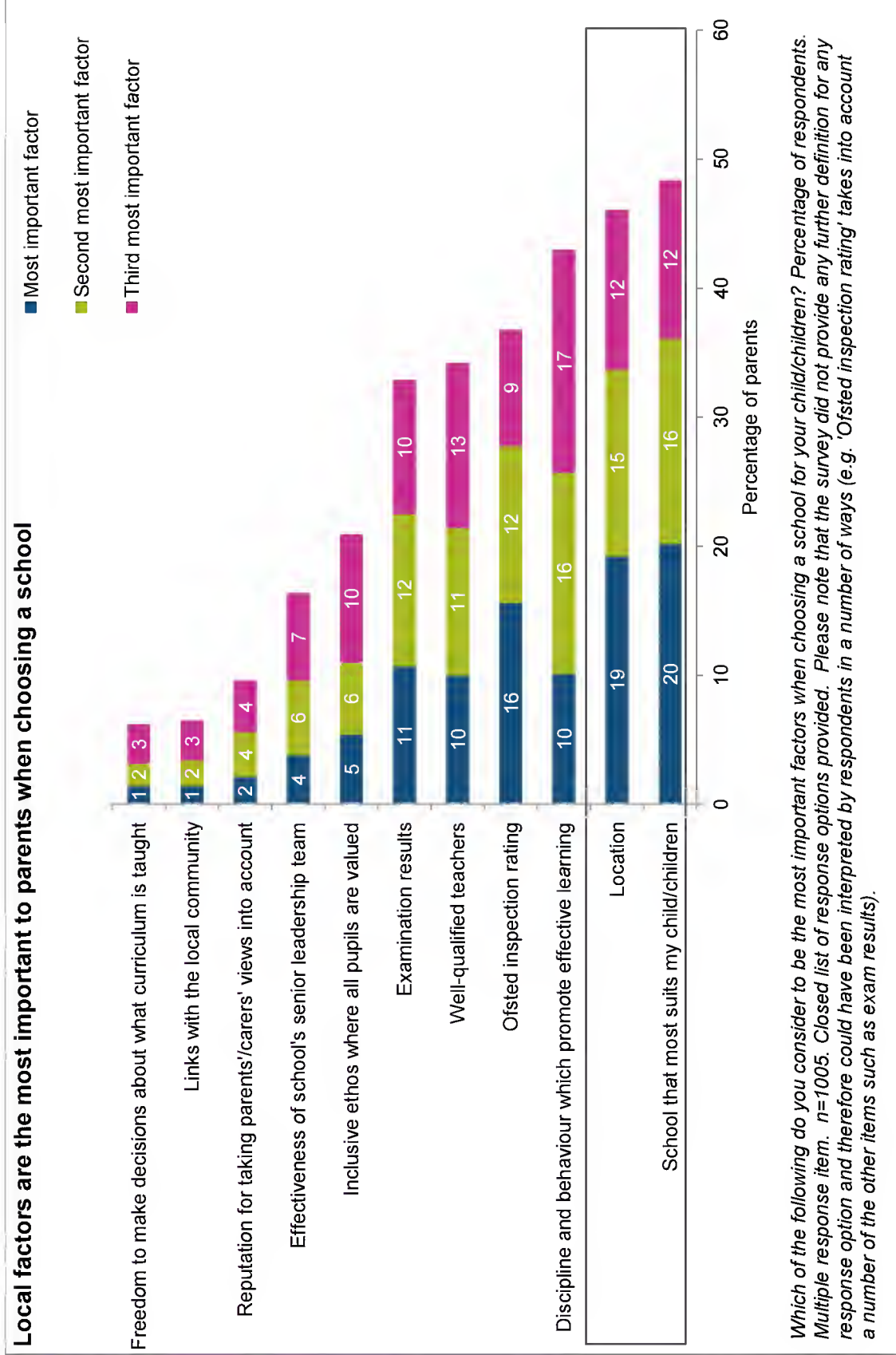
## 2 School choice

The majority of parents feel that they had a genuine choice in choosing a school



To what extent do you agree that you had a genuine choice in deciding which school your child/children attended? Response shown in per cent. n=1005 Agree/strongly agree Disagree/strongly disagree combined

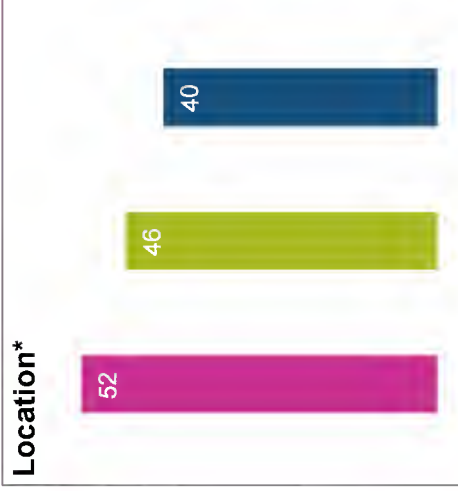
- In 2014, according to DfE figures, nearly 90 per cent of parents got their first choice of primary school for their children and 85 per cent got their first choice of secondary (DfE, 2014). Most respondents to our survey (72 per cent) also feel that they had a choice, although slightly fewer than got their first choice – highlighting that in some instances there may only be one real option available.
- Local factors, such as 'location' and 'school that most suits my child', are the most important to parents when choosing a school.
- Household income affects school choice. Location, well-qualified teachers and community links are more important to parents with a lower household income whilst discipline, exam results and the effectiveness of the school's senior leadership team are more important to parents with a higher household income.
- Most parents undertake a range of activities to help decide which school their child should attend, in particular undertaking their own research and attending open evenings or school visits. However, there are some differences by household income with those on a lower income more likely to let their child decide or select the school already attended by siblings.



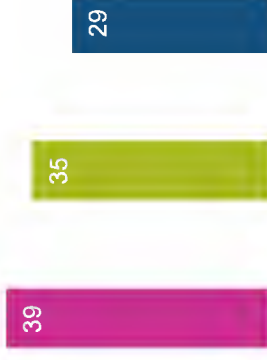
## Household income affects school choice



Location, well-qualified teachers and reputation for taking parent views into account are more important to parents with a **lower** household income...



### Well-qualified teachers

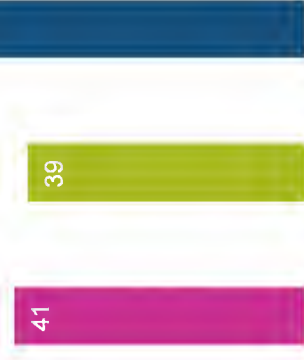


### Reputation for taking parents/carers views into account\*



...Discipline, exam results and the effectiveness of the school's leadership are more important to parents with a **higher** household income

### Discipline and behaviour which promote effective learning



### Examination results\*



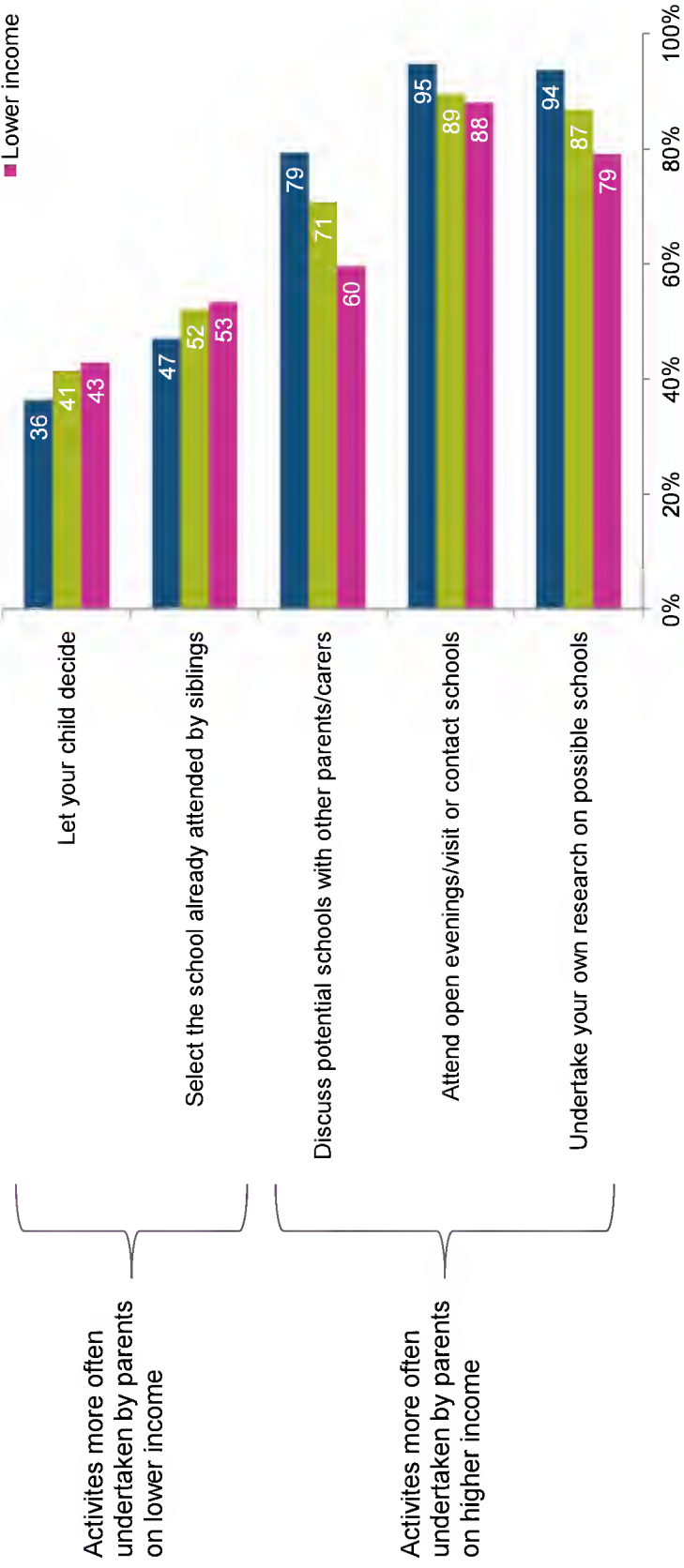
### Effectiveness of school's senior leadership team\*



Which of the following do you consider to be the most important factors when choosing a school for your child/children? Response cross-tabulated by household income and shown in per cent for statistically significant findings at  $p=0.05$ . Charts show respondents identifying item in their top three choices, charts marked with an \* indicate that the difference was also statistically significant for the top choice.  $n=1005$ . Lower income  $<£25,000$   $n=334$ . Middle income  $£25-50,000$   $n=294$ . Higher income  $>£50,000$   $n=377$



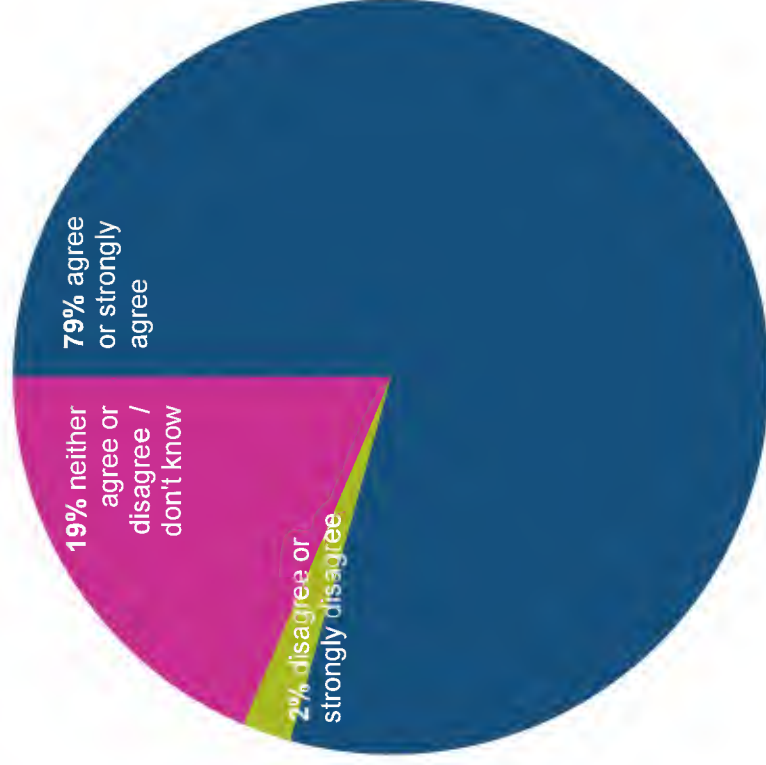
**Most parents undertake a range of activities to help decide which school their child should attend.** However, there are some differences by household income



When choosing a school for your child, do/did you... [multiple response items as listed above]. *n*=1005. Lower income <£25,000 *n*=334. Middle income £25-50,000 *n*=294. Higher income >£50,000 *n*=377

### 3 Local accountability

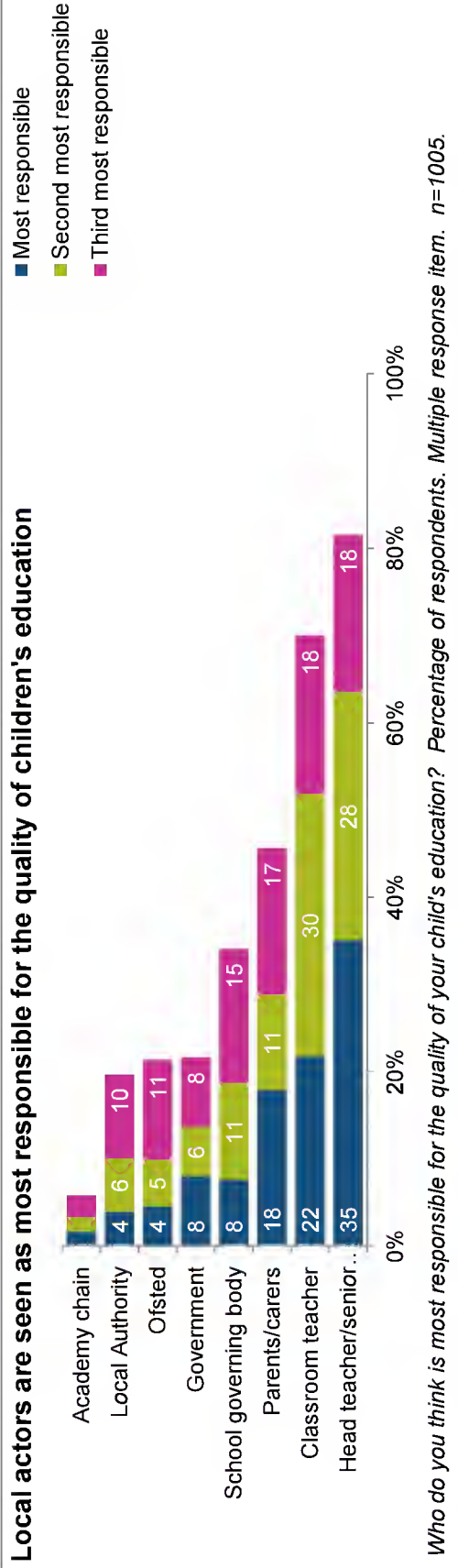
Parents believe schools should be locally accountable



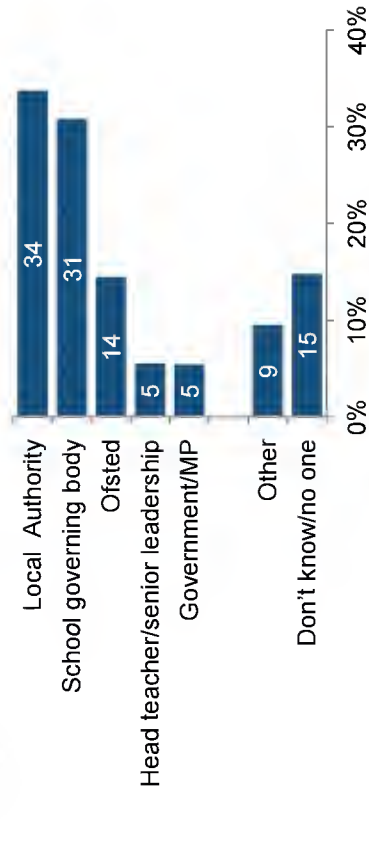
*% who agreed with the statement 'all publicly-funded schools should have an element of local accountability'. n=1005. Agree/strongly agree Disagree/strongly disagree combined. Please note that the survey did not provide any further definition of local accountability and this could have been interpreted by respondents in a number of ways (e.g. such as being held accountable by parents themselves and/or the school governing body).*

- Over three quarters of the parents responding to our survey believe schools should be locally accountable (however it should be noted that the survey did not provide any further definition of local accountability and this could have been interpreted by respondents in a number of ways).
- Local actors, such as the headteacher, classroom teachers and school governors are seen by parents as being most responsible for children's education. It is therefore logical that parents also say that they would pursue local routes, such as the local authority or the governing body, if they had a problem with their school.
- However, less than half of parents feel that they have a say in how their child's school is run. Parents of children at academy schools and parents with higher incomes are slightly more likely to feel they have an influence.

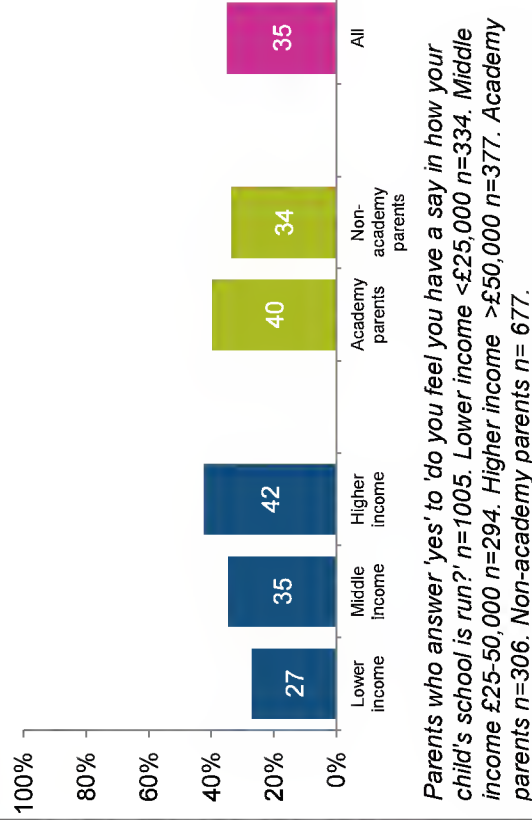
## Local actors are seen as most responsible for the quality of children's education



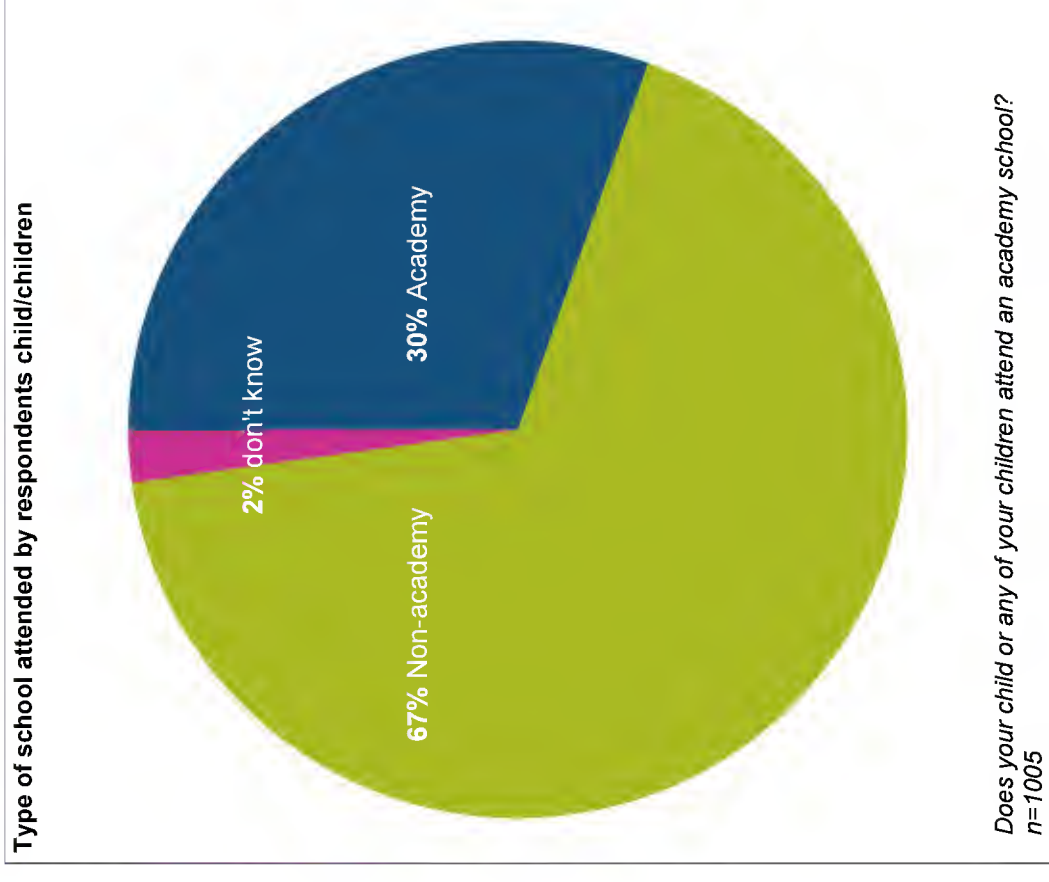
## Parents would turn to their local authority or the governing body if they had a problem with their school that the headteacher had not resolved



## Few parents feel that they have a say in how their child's school is run. Parents of children at academy schools and parents with higher incomes are slightly more likely to feel they have an influence.

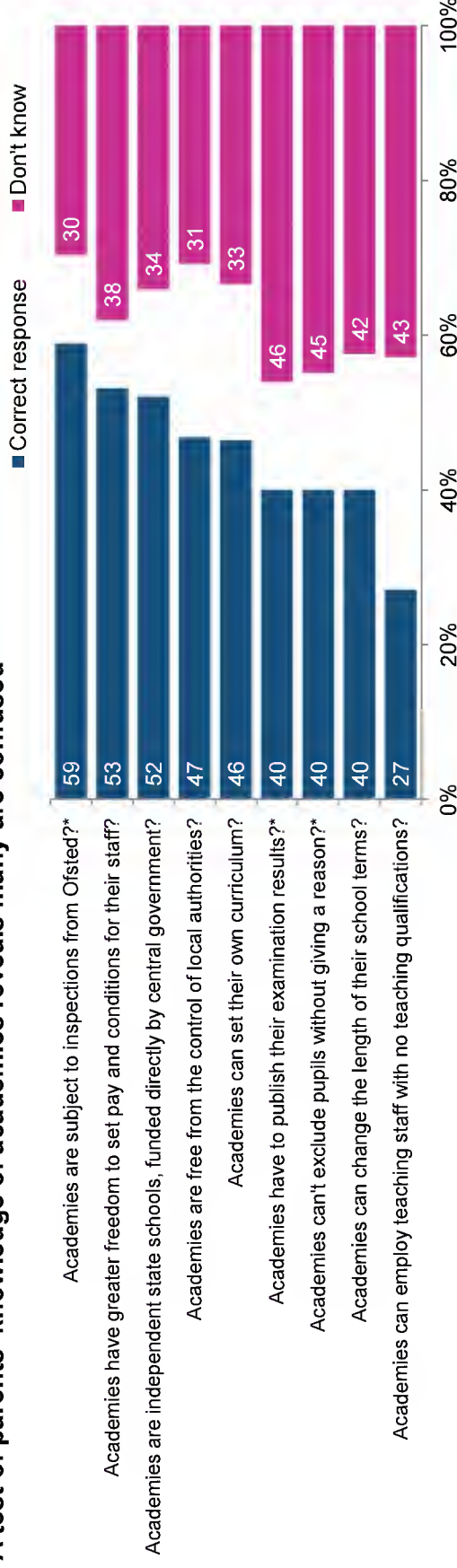


## 4 Academy schools



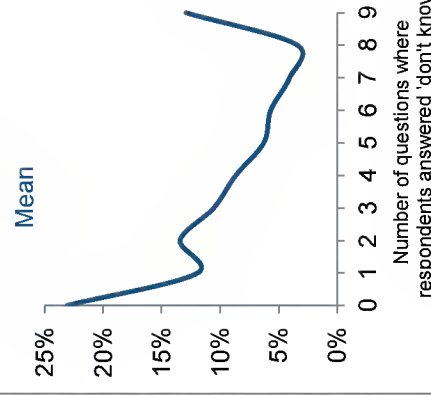
- Thirty per cent of our sample said they had a child that attended an academy school. This compares to 21 per cent of schools nationally (DFE 2014).
- A test of parents' knowledge of academies reveals many are confused about what an academy is and the differences between academies and maintained schools. We asked respondents nine questions about academies and on average respondents answered 'don't know' to three out of these nine. Respondents got an average of four questions correct. Parents with a higher income or with children at an academy school knew more about academies
- When directly asked 'how much do you feel you know about academy schools?', a majority of parents admitted that they did not know much. However, those on higher incomes or with children at an academy were slightly more confident.
- Many parents want more information about academy schools, especially those with children at an academy. Parents' feel that the DfE website was the best place to find out more about academies.

## A test of parents' knowledge of academies reveals many are confused

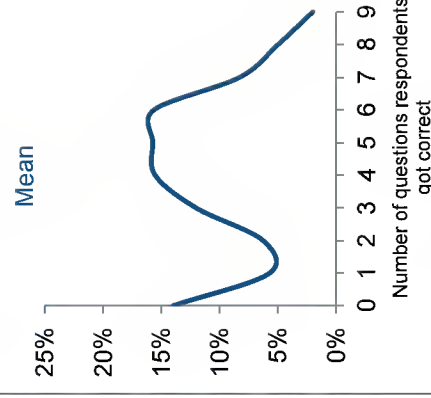


Knowledge test quest comprising of 9 statements (6 true / 3 false, items with '\*' were false but have been reversed for reporting). N=1005.

On average, respondents answered 'don't know' to 3.4 out of 9 questions



On average, respondents got 4.0 questions correct out of 9



Parents on a higher income or with children at an academy school know more about academies

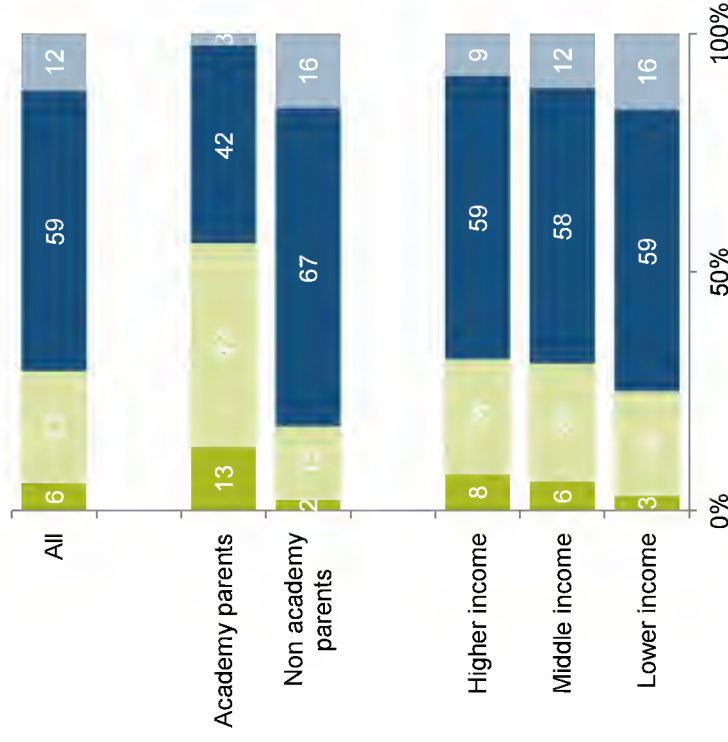


Knowledge test quest comprising of 9 statements (6 true / 3 false). N=1005. Chart shows mean response. Lower income <£25,000 n=334. Middle income £25-50,000 n=294. Higher income >£50,000 n=377. Academy parents n=306. Non-academy parents n= 677.



### Parents admit that they do not know much about academies. Those on higher incomes or with children at an academy were slightly more confident

■ A great deal  
■ Quite a lot  
■ Not very much  
■ Nothing at all



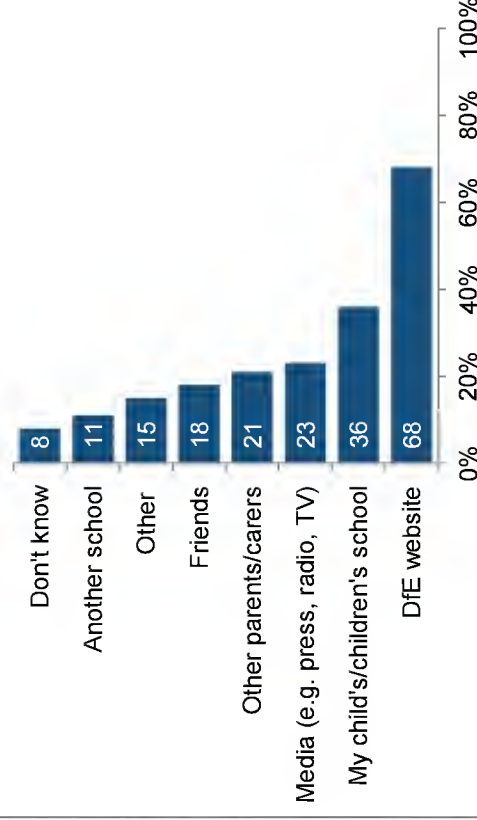
How much do you feel you know about academy schools? N=1005. Lower income <£25,000 n=334. Middle income £25-50,000 n=294. Higher income >£50,000 n=377. Academy parents n=306. Non-academy parents n= 677.

### Many parents want more information about academy schools, especially those with children at an academy



Would you like further information on academy schools? N=877 (respondents answering 'don't know' removed from sample). Academy parents n=283. Non-academy parents n= 579.

### Parent's think that the DfE website was the best place to find out more about academies



If you wanted to find out more about academy schools, where would you get the information? Multiple response item. N=2011.

## References

Department for Education (2014). *Secondary and Primary School Applications and Offers: March to April 2014* (Statistical First Release 17/2014) [online]. Available: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/325695/SFR\\_17-2014\\_Apps\\_and\\_Offers.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/325695/SFR_17-2014_Apps_and_Offers.pdf) [24 April, 2015].

**NFER provides evidence for excellence  
through its independence and insights,  
the breadth of its work, its connections,  
and a focus on outcomes.**

- independent
- insights
- breadth
- connections
- outcomes

**National Foundation for  
Educational Research**  
The Mere, Upton Park  
Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ

T: 01753 574123  
F: 01753 691632  
E: [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk)  
[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)